

## ***Bittersweet Day for United States Merchant Marine Academy's Class of 2005***

**By Martin Skrocki, Public Information Officer, USMMA**

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy's Class of 2005, also labeled the Class of 9/11 because its members arrived at Kings Point just weeks before the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, graduated on June 20.

The 219 members of this class sat under sunny skies and listened to U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary R. James Nicholson and U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta laud the graduates for their sense of duty and for their role in the war on terrorism.

The 2005 class had a special connection to the events of 9/11. As plebes, they watched from a vantage point on the Kings Point campus as the twin towers burned and collapsed. Just hours later, 18 members of the class joined some 70 other upper classmen and mounted a nine-day relief mission in New York Harbor aboard Academy small craft. They tirelessly ferried police, firefighters, medical personnel, and supplies from points around the harbor to Ground Zero.

In the four years that followed, some 30 members of the class participated in sea training assignments on U.S. merchant ships carrying supplies to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"People come to service academies with ideas about what they want to do



***Hats Up in the Air***

*Photo Courtesy of the USMMA*

with their lives," says graduate Gerald Fortuna, 22, of Penn Yang, New York. "But after 9/11, things changed for a lot of us."

Thirty-three of the June graduates were commissioned for active duty in the Armed Forces: 15 in the U.S. Navy, two in the Marine Corps; nine in the Coast Guard; three in the Air Force; and four

in the Army. One graduate entered the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The rest of the graduates were commissioned in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

The class of 2005 included 29 women and four international students from the Republic of Panama.

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